LETTER OF RELIGION.

BETWEEN

Theophilus *and* Eugenio.

Mobilis & varia eſt ferme natura malorum;
Cum ſcelus admittunt, ſupereſt conſtantia; quid fas
Atq; nefas, tandem incipiunt ſentire peractis
Criminibus; tamen ad mores natura recurrit
Damnatos— JUVEN. *Sat.* 13.

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MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

Letters of Religion, &c.

THEOPHILUS *to* EUGENIO.

SIR,

THE Indisposition and Deadness to Religion and Virtue, which since *Adam's* Fall appears in the Mind of Man, or in other Words, the moral Impotence and Disinclination of the Will to a pure and divine Life, has been the frequent Subject of my Contemplation: And imagining that my Sentiments upon that Head may be in some Measure useful to your self, whose Interest and Welfare, especially in the Matters of the highest Importance, which relate to your future Felicity, I earnestly desire to promote, I offer them to your serious Consideration; and if I shall find they are acceptable, and likely to be beneficial, by informing your Judgment, or confirming your pious Resolutions, I shall not discontinue this Correspondence.

THERE is not a clearer and more convincing Argument of the degenerate State and moral Impotence of Humane Nature, than that perpetual Strife and Opposition between our intellectual Faculties and our Senses, which is experienced by the greatest Part of Mankind. It is true that some excellent Christians are elevated to such Strength, and Heights of Virtue, that they have in a great Measure subdued their inordinate Appetites, restored the Dominion of Reason, and reduced their Passions to Obedience; and that some on the contrary, whose inbred Propensions to Vice are confirmed and improved by a profligate Course of Life, have at length brought over their Judgments to the side of Immorality and Prophaneness, and by enslaving their Reason have composed the Contention, and made all Things for the present easy within

within; yet the Number of these is small, compared with those, who are in a middle State between the other two. These unhappy Persons feel a perpetual Conflict and Dispute between their exorbitant Appetites, and the superior Faculties of the Soul; their Breasts are Theaters of Strife and Fields of Battle, where Reason and Passion always contend, but with various Success, for Power and Victory. Most Men are at Variance with themselves, and are constantly torn and distracted by the Civil Feuds and Tumults of two intestine Parties, that aim at Government; and had Mr. *Hobbs* thus explained himself, I should readily grant his Assertion, That every Man is born in a State of War.

THESE Persons do sometimes in a calm and sedate Temper contemplate and approve a religious Life, and believe the Practice of Vertue is the certain way to Peace and Happiness; but soon after disarm'd of their Reason, naked and unguarded, they are drawn aside by the Allurements of forbidden Pleasure, spur'd on by the Instigation of vicious Appetites, or hurried away by violent and impetuous Passions, till they fall by the Power of some prevalent Temptation: After this criminal Gratification of their sensual Desires, they reflect with Displeasure and Indignation upon their Folly and Weakness, bewail their unsteady and inconstant Temper, and review with Shame and Regret their late Polution; overwhelm'd with Sorrow and Confusion they melt into Tears, and stung with Anguish and Remorse, vow and resolve no more to repeat their detested Sin, and dreading the Wrath of their offended Maker, they confess their Guilt, and deprecate his Displeasure.

AND now the Penitents feel their Minds at rest, and believe themselves reinforced with so much Strength, that they think they are able to preserve their Innocence, and resist the most attractive Snares; but the Force of these warm Ideas by degrees abating, their Watchfulness slacken'd, and their Resolutions growing cooler, they are again surprized and overcome by the like forbidden Objects. After this shameful Fall they return to the Confession of Guilt, repeat the penitential Scene, and renew their Resolutions never to relapse; but these vertuous Purposes, as ineffectual and impotent as the former, vanish like the Morning Cloud in the Heat and Violence of succeeding Temptations. Thus the unhappy Men, distracted and divided in themselves, sometimes under the

guidance

guidance of Understanding and Reason, and as oft overpower'd and govern'd by evil Inclinations and Habits, spend their Lives in a sad Succession of Guilt and Repentance, and in making and breaking worthy Resolutions.

IN secular Affairs and the common Concerns of Life, the Case is quite otherwise: In these instances, when Men with due Deliberation have weighed and compared Things together, have judged what is best and fittest to be done, and chosen the End, and fixed upon the Means to attain it, a ready and a vigorous Execution follows their Choice and Determination: If the avaricious Man has set his Heart upon Riches, the Ambitious on Power, the Vain-glorious on Fame, their Resolutions are prevalent and effectual, and their Pursuits of their respective Ends carried on without Weariness or Interruption. The Reason of this Difference is, that in secular Affairs, abstracting from moral Considerations, the Resolutions we make, and the Pursuits we are engaged in, meet with no Opposition from any contrary Spring of Motion within us; whereas the Resolutions we form to follow the Determination of our Understanding and Judgment, in the Practice of Vertue and Religion, are violently thwarted and opposed by different Principles of Action, born with us, and interwoven in our Constitutions. Our Understanding and Reason, that are vested with an original Right to direct and govern the inferior Faculties, and in a State of Innocence might exercise that Power without controul, in this our corrupt and degenerate Condition find their Right of Regency contested, their Authority disregarded, and their Commands disputed, by evil Propensions and disobedient Passions, which set up for themselves, and usurp the Government; and what a restless and miserable Life must he live, who feels this perpetual Strife and Contrast in his Mind, is divided against himself, and is always disturbed and agitated by two contrary Principles of Motion, his Judgment and his Senses? This Person is still displeased with himself, arraigns and condemns his own Actions; and frequently in bitter Anguish, wounds and peirces his Heart with sharp Reflections and just Invectives; his Breast resembles a troubled Sea, roused up and driven to different Shores, as adverse Winds or opposite Tides prevail in their furious Conflict: When he offers Violence to his Reason, breaks through his solemn Resolutions, and by a new Relapse gratifies his

Criminal Inclinations, how dear does he purchase the forbidden Fruit? Upon a calm Review of his Fall, the faithful Judge, which inſults the Offender, reproaches his Folly and ſhameful Cowardice, ſets before him the ſad Conſequences of his Guilt, and fills his Soul with Fears of Divine Diſpleaſure. The Satisfaction he enjoyed by yielding to the Allurements that enſnared him, is ſlight and quickly vaniſhes; but the conſequent Trouble and inward Pangs are great and permanent; his conſcious Remorſe, like an enraged Viper, ſtings and gnaws his Heart with laſting and unſpeakable Torments: And tho' 'tis true, as before mention'd, that ſome Men, after repeated unſucceſsful Conflicts finding themſelves unable to conqure their Habits of Vice, have deſperately reſolved to make themſelves eaſy by ſubduing their Reaſon, and ridding themſelves of its troubleſome Reſtraints, and have by long Cuſtom ſo effectually compaſs'd their End, that they are ſeldom diſturbed with unquiet Reflections; tho' at Seaſons by ſome awakening Incidents the Light and Power of Conſcience breaks in upon them, makes them tremble at the frightful Repreſentation of their Guilt and Danger; yet theſe are few, if we regard the vaſt Number of thoſe, who in Chriſtian Nations have by good Education been inſtructed in the Rules of Piety and Vertue, but were never able to form Reſolutions ſtrong enough to engage them thoroughly in the Practice of it; but in that unequal and interrupted Manner, which has been deſcribed, they have at once approved and diſobeyed the Dictates of Reaſon and Religion.

BUT now, *Sir*, it is time to conſider, that if I proceed I ſhall tranſgreſs the Bounds of a Letter, if I have not done it already; and therefore, that I may not put your Patience to an uneaſy ſtretch, I will here add no more, but that I am

Your moſt humble Servant,

THEOPHILUS.

The Second LETTER.

EUGENIO to THEOPHILUS.

SIR,

WHEN I had read your most obliging and instructive Letter, which contains an Essay on the moral Weakness of Humane Nature, I found it so exactly adapted to my Circumstances, that if I had sate to your Pen for my Picture, you could not have drawn me more to the Life, nor given me a truer and more finished Likeness. I was born, as you know, of Parents esteemed and beloved for their eminent Vertue and Sobriety of Manners, who took Care that my Education should be such as might dispose me to follow their excellent Examples; I was sent to School, afterwards to the University, and am now settled in the Country; where, my Father being Dead, I inherit a plentiful Fortune: Yet notwithstanding all Temporal Circumstances of Life conspire to make me easy, I am that unhappy Man you have described, one distracted and divided between my Judgment and my Appetites; I feel a perpetual Strife and Conflict in my self, whilst I am swayed and influenced, with various Event, by two opposite Principles, and am always labouring to please two Masters, that enjoyn quite contrary Tasks.

THE Propensions of degenerate Nature, and evil Habits acquired by Custom, are a strong Weight and Byass upon my Will, inclining me one way; while my Understanding and Reason, inlighted by Scripture Revelation, direct me another: Sometimes in a sedate and cool Temper I am determined to obey the Dictates of my Judgment, and the Rules of Christian Religion; these Resolutions upon Tryal prove ineffectual and abortive, and vanish at the next Approach of the tempting Object. After I have been entangled and seduced into Criminal Compliances, I bitterly inveigh against my self, and bewail my Irresolution and Stupidity; yet soon after I give a fresh Occasion for the like Sorrow: I am always falling into Temptation, and rising by

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Repentance; always polluting my self with Guilt, or endeavouring to wash it off with my Tears, which however sink not deep enough to reach and cherish the Root of Vertue, and make it rise to a flourishing State. This convinces me that the Ideas of Vertue only hover in my Imagination, and float on the Surface of the Brain, but are not bright and warm enough to influence my Heart, and produce such vigorous Purposes as will abide the Test.

THUS fluctuating and undetermined, I hang in endless suspence between Vertue and Vice, and like a Needle between two Load-stones I waver and tremble between two Rival Objects, that attract me with alternate prevailing Force; during this perpetual Vicissitude, and these frequent Revolutions, I am sometimes swayed by the Power of my corrupt Inclinations, and sometimes I obey the Dictates of awakened Conscience; this Day I venture to take down a sweet Draught of Sin, and the next I grow dead sick, and cast it up with sad Reflections and bitter Repentance; I see my Folly, and lament my Irresolution; I strive, but yield; I repent, but relapse; and always resolve against the Inclinations and Habits, which I am unable to conquer. In this Conflict and undecided Dispute, my Soul is distracted and torn in Pieces. When I am surrounded with Friends and good Company, my Satisfactions are forced and superficial; in the midst of Pleasure I am really sad, and the constant Sense of my Guilt, and the returning Fears and Misgivings of my Heart, fill me with such Disquiet and Regret, that my Life grows a Burden, and my Expectations from Affluence and Plenty are disappointed. I beseech you, Sir, to commiserate my Calamity, and direct me to some prevalent and effectual Means how to fix and determine my Resolutions, that I may hereafter be able to resist my Appetites and govern my Passions, and live a more even, equal, and uniform Life; by this you will infinitely oblige

Your most humble Servant,

EUGENIO.

The

The Third LETTER.

THEOPHILUS to EUGENIO.

SIR,

YOU expres your Inability to resist the Power of your irregular Inclinations in so moving a Manner, and appear so willing and so much in earnest to subdue your immoral Habits, and govern your Passions, that I look on my self obliged to lend you all the Assistance I am able, for the accomplishing of such a worthy Design.

THE Direction, Sir, which I give you is to form in your Mind the most detestable Idea of Vice, such as is suitable to its intrinsick Evil, and malignant Nature. In order to this, exercise your Reason, and consider with that sober Attention, which the Importance of the Subject requires, that as oft as captivated by the Allurements of Criminal Pleasures, and urged by the Instigations of eager Appetites, you comply with Temptation, and against the Dictates of your Judgment violate your Vertuous Resolutions, and wound your Conscience, you renounce your Allegiance to the supreme Ruler of the World, slight the great and glorious Rewards he has promised to Obedience, and bid defiance to his terrible Menaces, pronounced against contumacious Offenders. You vilify his Wisdom, as if he was ignorant and incapable of governing the World; and reproach his Goodness, as if he envy'd you your Pleasure and Felicity, had insnared you by his Precepts, and seduced you into Trouble and Calamity. You arraign the Justice and Equity of his Laws, and rob your Creator, who is therefore your Soveraign Lord and Owner, of his uncontested Right and Propriety in his Creature; while you alienate your Service, disclaim your Dependence and Subordination, and usurp a Power over your Actions, as if you were an unaccountable Being and at your own Disposal; and farther yet to aggravate the Guilt, you make the most ungrateful and unworthy Returns to your indulgent Father, and most generous and bountiful Benefactor.

TO do Evil is to act in contempt of the Rules of Reason, to stifle and controul the Motions and Strivings of your inbred faithful Monitor, that bears Witness against your Proceedings, struggles with you, and importunately urges and perswades you to forbear the Criminal Actions, and fills you with Remorse and Terror when you prove obstinate and inflexible to such earnest Entreaties. To do Evil is to vilify and debase the Dignity of Humane Nature, to act unworthy and misbecoming a reasonable Being; to degrade your self from the honourable Rank, and eminent Station wherein you are placed in the Creation, which is next, and but little inferior, to the blest angelick Order, and to sink your self to the low Condition of Brute Animals, who are governed by sensual Instincts and blind Apperites. Vice is the foulest Blemish and Dishonour, the most odious Blot and Pollution, the Disease, Sickness, and Deformity of the Soul. It breaks all the Harmony and regular Subordination of our Faculties, and introduces Discord, Darkness, and Confusion; while it sets up the Senses and Passions against the Superior Commanding Powers of the Mind. Vice brings you into the vilest Slavery under the most cruel, exacting and inexorable Master, who with unrelenting Rigour, and without any Suspension of your base Drudgery, compels you to undertake fresh ignominious and painful Tasks, or what is equally grievous, to repeat the old. To commit Sin, is to break the Connexion and Dependence, and subvert the beautiful Order of created Nature. If to become compleatly happy in a State of perfect Obedience and Conformity to the Will of our Maker, is the ultimate End of Man, as most certainly it is, then by opposing this End you destroy all the Goodness of your Being; for the Goodness of any Creature is nothing else than its Usefulness in relation to its End; as that of Meats and Drink is to nourish and refresh you, that of the Sun to enlighten the Air and revive the Earth. If you do not promote, and much more if you oppose, the Design of your Creation, you grow useless; and if useless, then your Goodness being destroyed and gone, you are in a manner dead or annihilated; and this is your greater Reproach, because all Beings besides in this World compire in perfect Harmony to bring about the Ends for which they were created, and pursue the Ways that lead them to a State of Perfection.

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LOOK upon Sin as the execrable Source of all the ſad Varieties of Miſchiefs and Calamity, that ever befel Mankind. It has made the World the Seat of Strife and Diſtraction, a diſmal Scene of Ignorance, Miſery and Confuſion; regard it as your greateſt Enemy, the Diſturber of your Peace and Tranquility, that diſpoſſeſſes you of the Enjoyment of your ſelf, and is the Author of all the Pains and Sufferings of your Body, and of all the Cares, Afflictions and Diſturbance of your Mind; reflect how dear your Compliance with Temptation has coſt you, how upon a ſad Review in ſober Intervals your Guilt has enraged and armed you againſt your ſelf, till in the Anguiſh of your Soul you have been almoſt driven to deſpair, and ready to offer Violence to your ſelf.

THIS is the Caſe; and if you continue unreformed, and by Cuſtom grow hard in Impiety, your unpardoned Offences will at laſt make you obnoxious to the Frowns and Vengeance of incenſed Omnipotence, and then your Condition will be moſt deplorable; your Miſery will be too great for the ſtrongeſt Imagination to conceive, or the moſt eloquent Tongue to expreſs.

THIS, Sir, is the firſt Direction I give you; and if by frequent and ſerious Meditation on the odious and deſtructive Nature of Vice, you gain by the Concurrence and Illumination of the divine Spirit a true Idea of it, it will grow ſo frightful and terrible to your Thoughts, that you will be ready to fly from it as your mortal Enemy, and become more conſtant in the Practice of Vertue. I am,

SIR,

Your moſt humble Servant,

THEOPHILUS.

The

The Fourth LETTER.

EUGENIO *to* THEOPHILUS.

SIR,

THIS brings you the most grateful Acknowledgments for your obliging Letter in answer to mine; I believed that one so well acquainted with the Nature of my Distemper was the most capable of directing proper Remedies for the Cure, and with Pleasure find I was not mistaken: I have followed your Directions, and endeavoured to draw such a hateful and deform'd Idea of Vice, as results from the various Instances you have given of its malignant and destructive Properties; which has created a greater Detestation and Abhorrence of it, than I have felt before. And now my Will is more fix'd and determined, and my Purposes are grown more vigorous to oppose it, and being come to a firm Resolution on this Point, I find a sudden calm and peaceful Disposition within; my Mind is now at rest, whereas before I was offended with my self, and continually displeas'd with my Actions: The great Disease and Sickness of the Mind, that consists in the Impotence and Unsteadiness of good Inclinations, I find much reliev'd by your Method, and begin to hope that I am now upon Recovery. I persuade my self, that thus reinforced I shall for the future lay more effectual Restraints upon inordinate Appetites, and encounter Temptations with more Success. This, Sir, I imagine, will prevail with you to continue your pious Assistance, since you seem to take Pleasure in propagating Vertue, and pointing out to others the way to Peace and Happiness. As I shall reap the Benefit of your Instruction, 'tis certain, on the other Hand, that you will not lose your Reward; a great and generous Christian, inspired with Love and Good Will to Mankind, that exerts all his Powers in doing Good, is a Spectacle worthy the Curiosity and Approbation of Angels, who cannot but look down with Pleasure, to observe on Earth, one that so nearly resembles their own excellent Nature.

I am, *SIR,*

With the greatest Respect,

Your obliged humble Servant,

EUGENIO.

The

The Fifth LETTER.

THEOPHILUS *to* EUGENIO.

SIR,

I HAVE perus'd your Second, in which you inform me that you have follow'd with Succeſs the Directions I ſent you; this I acknowledge has given me real Pleaſure; if from the Review of our Humanity and Benevolence in feeding the Hungry and cloathing the Naked, reviving the Diſconſolate, and extricating one's Neighbour out of Streights and Difficulties, reſults ſuch unfeigned Complacency, how much greater and more ſolid Satisfaction muſt ariſe from our Conſciouſneſs of having produced in others worthy Paſſions, confirmed their vertuous Reſolutions, and by this Means eminently promoted their Peace and Felicity? I ſhall therefore, with Alacrity, continue to ſupply you with thoſe Directions which I judge moſt effectual to ſettle and ſtrengthen your pious Purpoſes.

AS a warm and equal Idea of the deteſtable and pernicious Nature of Vice, cannot but create an Abhorrence of it in the Mind; ſo, on the other hand, a clear and genuine Repreſentation of Vertue and Religion, in proportion to its Strength and Brightneſs, muſt attract your Love, and engage your Eſteem and Veneration, which is that which I have further to ſubmit to your Conſideration. I muſt acknowledge that were I Maſter of the greateſt Judgment, the greateſt Vivacity of Thought, and the moſt extenſive Imagination, and had I the richeſt Stock of beautiful and expreſſive Words, I ſhould not yet be capable of doing Juſtice to the Subject; could any Fancy conceive, or any Eloquence delineate the amiable Features, and expreſs all the Charms and Graces of this Divine Object, what Admiration, what ardent Deſires, what Rapture would it excite? But who is equal to ſo great an Undertaking? Beſides, being confined within the narrow Limits of a Letter, I ſhall fall ſhort of what might be attempted with more Succeſs in wider

Room: Take then this imperfect Draught, or rather Sketch of Piety and Vertue, and enlarge and improve it by Contemplation.

VERTUE is a Divine Principle, that refines, enobles, and exalts the Soul, that illuminates and enlarges the Understanding, and by dispelling the Mist of Ignorance and Error, improves the glimmering Light of degenerate Nature. It imparts Clearness and Rectitude to the Judgment, strengthens and elevates our Reason, and asserts and confirms its Superiority and Dominion over the inferior Faculties; and as it infuses just and useful Notions, and wise Sentiments, so it changes the corrupt Bent and Inclination of the Mind prejudiced by Nature in favour of Vice, and takes off the Byas, that lies upon the Will, and carries it to unlawful Objects. Vertue is the Excellence and Dignity, the Health and Beauty, the Perfection and Felicity of our Nature. It creates a Divine Harmony in the Mind, appointing to all the Faculties and Powers of the Soul, and all the Passions and Appetites of the Body their proper Provinces, and putting them all into a regular and uniform Motion, under the Guidance and Dictates of right Reason. It introduces into the Mind a Serene and Divine Temper, and gives a Man the Possession and Enjoyment of himself: When you are Master of it in an eminent Degree, you'll be as sensible of it, as of Health and Vigour, and perceive it like Life and Spirit diffus'd thro' the Soul, animating its Faculties, and directing its Operations; it refines our Taste, seasons and corrects our Pleasures, mitigates our Care and Sorrow, and improves all our innocent Enjoyments: 'Tis the only Cordial, that can revive our sinking Spirits, and supports us in Extremity and Distress. It smooths rough Nature, and sweetens an unquiet Temper, keeps us in good Humour, and makes us pleased with our Selves and our Actions: 'Tis the subordinate Fountain, whence all the various Streams of Good are derived, that flow upon yourself, or spread thro the collected Body of Mankind: 'Tis the bountiful Author of all your Possessions, and of all the Satisfactions and Comforts, all the real Pleasures and Happiness, that you ever enjoyed. 'Tis not only the Condition, but Part of our Felicity; our Work and Duty are of the same kind with our Wages and Reward; for what else is Vertue, but Heaven begun? And what is Heaven, but Vertue finish'd? It recommends you to the Approbation of your Creator; and as it is his Image and Likeness stamp'd upon you, it ele-

vates your Nature to a great height of Dignity and Perfection: It will carry you thro' all the Straights and Difficulties of Life, comfort you in Sickness, support you in all Agonies of Death, and at last fill you with unconceivable Joys.

AND what is worthy your Reflection, Vertue is that necessary Disposition and Temper of Mind, that prepares and qualifies you for endless Happiness in the future State; without this, Heaven would not only prove an idle and restless Possession, but it must give you great Pain, become an oppressive Burden, and in a Sense reversed an exceeding Weight of Glory; without a Taste of Vertue, what Pleasure can you imagine you shall take in the Company of pure Angels, and of just Men made perfect? Far from being happy, you would be displeased in Bliss, punished in Heaven, and wish to be delivered from that Place of Torment.

IF you form in your Mind such an Idea of Vertue, and with an impartial and attentive Thought, frequently contemplate this beautiful Object, you will feel it by Degrees gain your Approbation, engage your Esteem, and attract your Love; and while you are touched with its Beauties, and captivated by its Charms, you will conquer the Prepossessions and Prejudices you have lain under, and find that they proceeded from false Representations and groundless Calumny. Upon nearer Approaches, and better Acquaintance, you will find Vertue so lovely and beneficial, that you will discern it is your Interest and Happiness, as well as your Duty and Obligation, and immediately and with Vigour resolve upon the Practice of it. I am,

Your humble Servant,

THEOPHILUS.

The Sixth LETTER.

EUGENIO to THEOPHILUS.

SIR,

I RETURN you a thousand Thanks for the Favour of your Third Letter, in which, for the confirming of my good Resolutions, you have suggested to me another happy Method. I have now contemplated the Idea of Vertue, as I had done before that of Vice; and comparing the Dignity, Beauty and Usefulness of the first with the odious and destructive Nature of the last, my Judgment is abundantly convinced, that Vertue should be prefer'd, chosen and pursued. The Decision on this side was so clear and easy, that I began to upbraid my Stupidity and Blindness, that should suffer such a Subject to come into debate; what an astonishing Thing is this, said I in my self, that it should be a Question with me, or the least Doubt, whether I should prefer Beauty to Deformity, Health and Ease to Pain and Sickness, Freedom to Slavery, and a State of Happiness to one of Misery and Calamity? Yet this really is the Case to be determined, and upon which I have been deliberating so long. Upon this, I grew displeased and offended with my self for my past Irresolution; I reproached my Hesitation in a Matter of such easy Choice, yet of such great Importance. I pursued this Contemplation till I came to a more vigorous Resolution than ever, to adhere stedfastly to the Cause of Vertue, and become more obedient to the Laws of God. I now feel that I am in earnest, and am so fix'd and resolved, that I can defy all the Powers of Vice, and all the Allurements of Temptation; my firm Purpose is to pursue, without Interruption, a regular and blameless Course of Life; and for the accomplishing of this End, I beg the continuance of your kind Admonitions.

I am, *SIR*,

Your obliged humble Servant,

EUGENIO.

The

The Seventh LETTER.

THEOPHILUS to EUGENIO.

SIR,

I AM pleased to read in your last the Declaration you make in favour of Religion, and your Resolutions to observe the Dictates of Reason in resisting your Appetites, and governing your Passions; yet give me leave to tell you, That in your own Opinion of your Strength, and the Prevalency of your good Purposes you appear, which is the usual Case of young and unexperienced Vertue, too sanguine, that I may not say presumptuous. A modest Diffidence or Distrust of your Firmness, which you will judge very reasonable, when you reflect how often you have imposed upon your self, and have been deceived by your own Heart, more often perhaps than by the great Seducer of Mankind, would oblige you to keep a stricter Guard upon your self, and watch with more Diligence and Circumspection, that you may not be surprized and overcome by fresh Temptation. I will now explain to you more fully the Grounds and Reasons why vertuous Resolutions, which seem'd to him that made them strong and unalterable, so often languish and give way in the Hour of Tryal; whence proceed that Inequality and Deformity of Life in the alternate Superiority of Vertue and Vice, which appears in such Numbers of Men.

YOUNG Persons, that approve Religion, and engage in the Practice of it, feel such warm Affections, and such vehement Transports of Love to the Divine Being, yet rather Passionate than Intellectual, that they seem confident of Success in opposing their Evil Inclinations; but their Vertue not grown up, and ripen'd into a new Nature, nor yet become the prevailing Byass and strongest Principle of Motion in the Heart, they soon relapse and betray the Impotence of their Resolutions.

IN this Case the Distemper of their Soul is of an intermitting kind; and tho' for the time it be restrained and suppress'd by good and generous Purposes, yet the Power of this Remedy being in too weak a Degree and unequal to the Malady, the criminal Fit returns, and shews that the irregular Ferment was not extinguished, but suspended.

THE predominant Principle or Power of Motion, as an innate Weight, impells the Soul, and makes it gravitate to Vice, and yield to the Attraction of sensual Pleasure: This for a while may not exert its Force, but remain unactive by Resistance of enlighted Judgment, and the Restraints of pious Purposes; but if those Purposes are not vigorous and deep rooted, the Bent and Inclination of degenerate Nature, tho' now under a State of Violence and Compression, will by its secret Spring throw off the weaker Power, and by a Motion of Restitution recover its Strength and Activity. The Stalks and Sprouts of Vice may be cut off, while the malignant Root lies deep, and every way branches thro' the Heart; which being a Native, and of spontaneous Growth, will if neglected, and much more if cherished, spring up again, and flourishing as before will prevail over the Principle of Vertue, which is of foreign Extraction, and but newly planted in a disagreeable and unfriendly Soil.

THE Young Practicers of Religion move like a Stone hurled in the Air, against an inbred Tendency and Propension, which always urging and striving downward upon every Abatement of the foreign imprinted Force, will return and recover the Center; and till Vertue confirm'd by a long and steady Custom becomes a stronger Nature, and a more impulsive Principle of Action, than that of Vice, there will be no Beauty or Uniformity in their Lives.

THIS Fluctuation and Instability of Mind, and the uneven and unequal Variety of our Actions, besides what has been said, arise partly from the Revolutions and frequent Changes in our Blood and Humours, of which some favour and promote our good Inclinations, and some our bad: As every vertuous Man, that reflects, will acknowledge that he sometimes finds a great Deadness and Indisposition to pious Duties, and other times a Vivacity, Ardour and Delight in the Service of Religion, which he cannot account for; so bad Men, tho' generally engaged in a Course of Vice, have at Seasons their Fits of

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Vertue, for which they are at a loſs to give a Reaſon. This is owing partly to the Viciſſitude and different Temper of the Humours and Ferments of the Body, and chiefly to the changeable Nature and Diſpoſition of the Animal Spirits, the Inſtruments of Imagination, Sence and Motion. As theſe are differently modify'd and put into Motion, we are differently affected; ſometimes they are ſluggiſh, cold and unactive, and the Objects repreſented by them in the Imagination, being weak and dim, make but little Impreſſion on the Mind, and excite no worthy Paſſion in the Heart; at other times, the ſame Spirits, kindled and expanded, grow bright and active, and move with extraordinary Strength and Swiftneſs, and the Ideas form'd by them in ſuch a State are clear and vigorous, ſtrike the Mind with prevailing Force, and leave behind deep and laſting Characters.

DURING this Seaſon, while the Sprits are calm and ſerene, while the Pulſe beats ſteady, ſlow and regular, and the Tide of Blood runs ſmooth and untroubled, Reaſon and Judgment have the Advantage, and at this time ſuch Reſolutions may follow their Dictates, that the Maker of them imagines will be prevalent and effectual; but this more favourable Temper ſoon changes, and a very different Diſpoſition ſucceeds, when the Spirits are dilated, vehement and inflamed, when the Humours are too much agitated, and the Ferments exalted and over active: At this Seaſon, an unconfirmed Chriſtian is expoſed to the utmoſt Danger, and 'tis likely his Judgment will be now over-ruled, and its Determinations reverſed; that his Purpoſes will yield to the Impulſe and Inſtigation of his eager and exorbitant Appetites, or be born down by the Violence of ſome impetuous Paſſion.

ANOTHER Reaſon why thoſe pious Reſolutions, which at their Birth look ſtrong and active, prove after impotent and ſhort-lived, is, that they were form'd ſoon after the Criminal Deſire had been gratify'd to Satiety; for now Reaſon prevailing in its turn, arraigns and condemns the Action. The Worm within, rouzed and enraged, ſtings the Offender with Remorſe and conſcious Reflections, that fill him with Shame, Self-diſpleaſure and Indignation; but by Degrees this Storm blows over, and the Criminal upon new Purpoſes of Amendment is reconciled to himſelf, till his ſenſual Inclinations recover Strength and demand a freſh Gratification.

ANOTHER Reason of the Fickleness and Inconstancy of our Minds in respect of the moral Conduct of our Lives, is, that we generally form our Resolutions against Vice in cool Blood, during the Absence of the ensnaring Object. In this Case, its Idea in the Imagination is faint and dim, nor does it exert half its Force or display half its Charms; but when the tempting Object is before you, the Image it conveys to your Thought and Preception, is active, bright and warm, and therefore strikes the Fancy with so much Force, that it rouzes and awakens the Appetites and Passions, and sets them into a vehement Motion; and now, impatient of Restraint, they sollicit the Will with Importunity and Earnestness, while Reason overmatched in the struggle is born down and disarm'd, and the Criminal set free to indulge his unwarrantable Pleasures.

BUT after all, you cannot expect any considerable Fruits of your Contemplations and good Endeavours, without a due Dependance on the constant Aid and Co-operation of the Divine Spirit; for 'tis He who, by his gracious Influence, and mighty Power, subdues our moral Impotence, and works in the Minds of Men to Will and to Do of his own good Pleasure: And this Assistance being absolutely necessary for the first Formation of the new Creature, that is, a sincere Principle of Piety in the Heart; so it is no less required for carrying on a new Life, and producing a Series of good and vertuous Actions: You will therefore be obliged frequently and earnestly to address your self in Prayer to the Fountain of all Grace and Goodness, that you may obtain the Communications and powerful Help of the Divine Spirit, to produce in your Mind evangelical Belief in Christ the Saviour of the World, and a thorough Resolution to obey his Laws, without which no well grounded Confidence toward God, or settled Peace and Tranquility of Mind can be procured; as likewise to enable you to subdue evil Habits and Dispositions, and conduct your Life in a more steady and equal Practice of Vertue: You must therefore use your best Endeavours by devout Prayer, serious Meditation, Reading, and Christian Conversation; and then Divine Assistance will be always ready to co-operate with you, to strengthen and confirm your Resolutions, and carry you on to a victorious and predominant Degree of Piety.

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TO ſtrive and labour by your own good Actions to produce in your ſelf a Renovation of Nature, and ſufficient Ability to live a Life ſincerely Pious and Divine, without your Reliance on the gracious Power of the Spirit of Purity and Sanctification, or to depend entirely on that Aſſiſtance without your own careful and ſincere Endeavours to attain a prevailing Principle of Piety and moral Goodneſs, are the Extremes to be avoided on either ſide.

THAT you may preſerve an eſtabliſh'd Courſe of Religion and moral Duties, I adviſe you to dwell more conſtantly in the Contemplation of Spiritual and Divine Objects, for by that means you may maintain a heavenly Frame and Diſpoſition of Mind; if your ſerious Meditations on the Divine Being, and his Attributes are frequent, and the Ideas of a future State of Happineſs or Miſery are clear and active, by the gracious Concurrence of the ſanctifying Spirit you will gain greater Strength and Power to reſiſt Temptations, and preſerve a more uniform Practice of Vertue and Piety; for the great Reaſon why the tranſient Objects of Sence, and the Enjoyments of worldly Pleaſure prevail over ſpiritual, heavenly and immortal Joys, is, that the latter, tho' of infinite more Weight and Importance, being at great diſtance and unſeen, the Repreſentation of them to the Underſtanding is made by a very faint and glimmering Light; and therefore they become ineffectual and unoperative, being over-power'd and born down by the ſtronger and more lively Ideas of Earthly Satisfactions, and the Objects of Sence, which are preſent to us, and with which we were early acquainted, and have long been familiar. Beſides, let it be conſidered that the Soul, while united to the Body, and obliged to uſe material Organs in its Operations, has a great deſire to receive its Impreſſions by ſome ſenſible Conveyance; whence ſpiritual and inviſible Things, tho' of the ſublimeſt Nature, and the greateſt Conſequence, as well as abſtracted and metaphyſical Notions, are entertained by the Mind with Difficulty and Diſſatisfaction. Were the Scenes of a new Exiſtence in a future Life, the eternal Joys and Triumphs of the Spirits of juſt Men made perfect, who ſtand in the Preſence of their glorify'd Head and Saviour, diſplay'd before our Sight, they would effectually over-ballance all the Profits and Pleaſures of this World, being of infinitely greater Excellence and Goodneſs; were they, I ſay, convey'd to the Mind by the like Advantage of ſenſible Perception.

Now the more frequently and intenſely you fix your Thoughts on theſe future inviſible Objects, the nearer you will bring them to your Mind, and ſo remove the Diſadvantage of their Diſtance; and the more brightly and clearly you repreſent them, the more you make amends for their unſeen State, and remove their diſability of acting upon us on that Account: This is to live by Faith, the Evidence of Things not ſeen, to make future Objects in a Manner preſent, and give them operative Life and Vigour.

BY this ſacred Commerce your Mind will become ſo full of pure and Celeſtial Ideas, that there will be no room left for a Crowd of earthly, vain or ſinful Objects, which cannot obtrude themſelves upon the Imagination entirely taken up with more excellent Things. What Impreſſion can Treaſure and great Poſſeſſions make upon the Mind, that is contemplating ſeriouſly the Kingdom of Heaven, and a Crown of Glory that never fades away? What are the Pomp and Majeſty of an earthly Court, the Magnificence of Palaces, and crowded Theaters, to One, who has in View the Glories of Heaven, the Triumphs of the Saints, and the ineffable Splendor of the Angelick Order? What are Feaſts, Sports, Plays, and all the Varieties of ſenſual Pleaſures and Delights to him, who ſtedfaſtly fixes his Eye on Celeſtial Bliſs, and everlaſting Tranſports of Joy? And how regardleſs muſt that Chriſtian be of Fame, and the Praiſes of Men, whoſe Thoughts are taken up in ſeeking after the Approbation of God, the Applauſe of Angels, and the Congratulations of glorified Saints? If your Contemplations carry you thus to Heaven, you will be in a great Meaſure ſet above the Power of thoſe Temptations, which have been apt to enſnare you: This indeed is to be heavenly minded, and elevated above this ſinful World.

I readily allow that the neceſſary Buſineſs of Life will often recur and require your diligent Attendance, which however by the Intention and Direction of the Mind ſhould always be made ſubſervient to the great End of Religion, God's Glory, and your own Happineſs; and while you are employed in ſuch inferiour Duties, you will be obliged, ſaving when now and then you interpoſe ſome pious Ejaculations, to ſuſpend your Spiritual Entertainments and Divine Reflections; but when Leiſure and Freedom from worldly Affairs return, if your Mind returns chiefly to devout Meditations, you will gain the Advantages

rages I have before named, you will every Day grow in Grace; which thus constantly cherish'd with the friendly Influences of Heaven, will take deep root in your Mind, spread abroad its Branches, and bring forth Fruit abundantly in your Life. This is to keep the Heart with all Diligence, and to preserve that Fountain pure and unpolluted, whence the Streams of Piety and Goodness may flow untroubled, and without Interruption. Thus the Practice of Religion by Degrees will become natural, and therefore lasting and easy, and at length delightful, while the Principle of Grace and Vertue introduced into the Heart by Regeneration is daily strengthen'd and improv'd.

INURE your self to serious Supplication and Prayer, as well Private as Publick, to God the Fountain of all Goodness, and let not your Prayers be pronounced only by your Lips, but be such as are accompany'd with suitable Emotions within, and such as you feel coming from the Heart; while your Confessions are attended with true Sorrow and Repentance, your Petitions poured forth with Dependance, Hope and humble Assurance, and your Praises and Doxologies with fervent Alacrity and unfeigned Thankfulness: This Intercourse and Correspondence with Heaven by repeated Meditation and unwearied Acts of Devotion, will carry you on to a greater Facility of doing good Duties, till you become a confirm'd Christian; or it will discover your secret Hypocrisy, and shew you to your self, while weary of such an uneasy Life, you will throw off at length your burdensome Duties, and betake your self to an open Course of Vice and Irreligion.

EXERCISE a lively Faith on the crucified Redeemer of Mankind; rely upon the Merit of his Life and Sufferings as the Ransom paid for your Redemption; frequent his holy Table with due Solemnity, and ardent Devotion, and by a proper Commemoration of his Death, you will be animated and excited to imitate the holy Example of his Life.

YOUR constant Attendance to the Divine Presence, and your actual Reflections, that he is within you and about you, and that he spies out all your Ways; that he is nearer and more necessary to you than your Soul is to your Body; that you live by his Life, and act by his Strength, and think and reason by a Power communicated from him, considering at the same time that God is a pure and holy Being, One that hates all Sin with a perfect hatred, will be a powerful Motive and

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Encouragement to do well, and a strong Dissuasive from doing in his Sight what is displeasing and offensive to him.

AND since you know you must certainly die and appear before the impartial Tribunal of the great Judge of Heaven and Earth, to be sentenced to everlasting Misery, or put into Possession of eternal Joys, according to what you have done in this Life; if you constantly have Death in your View, and in your Thoughts and Expectations die daily; if you stedfastly will compare this Span of Life, the momentary Continuance here, with all the Ages of Eternity; you will find this Method to be a great Friend and Preservative of Vertue. If you duly number your Days, you will apply your Heart to the highest Wisdom.

I can only name these Heads of Advice, and suggest them to be improved by your serious Meditations, for I have already exceeded the Compass of a Letter: If you signify to me your Desire that I should write to you more at large on These, or communicate my Thoughts on any other Religious Subjects, by which you imagine I may be useful to you in Matters of such high Concernment, and vast Consequence, I shall readily comply with your Request.

I am, *S I R*,

With great Sincerity,

Your humble Servant,

THEOPHILUS.